

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Harkins Supports Legislation to Protect Sporting Officials



State Rep. John Harkins, R-Stratford, today voted in favor of legislation designed to protect sports officials in Connecticut. House Bill 5222, An Act Concerning The Assault Of A Sports Official, now goes to the State Senate for consideration.

Under HB 5222, which is cosponsored by Rep. Harkins, the state would establish a separate crime for assault of a sports official. This crime would be defined as causing physical injury to a sports official and/or intending to intimidate, harass, or retaliate against the sports official because of his or her officiating duties. The bill would make this crime a class D felony punishable by one to five years in prison, a fine of up to \$5,000, or both.

Sports officials that would be protected under the legislation include any person who officiates or enforces the rules at an amateur sporting or athletic event such as umpires, referees, judges, timekeepers and scorers. According to the non-partisan Office of Legislative Research (OLR), under current law, there are a number of different assault crimes with penalties ranging from a class A misdemeanor to a class B felony depending on the severity of the harm and the circumstances of the crime.

“Unfortunately, there will always be some individuals who can’t control themselves at sporting events,” said Rep. Harkins. “These people embarrass themselves, their families and can injure others. Sports officials should be allowed to focus on the game at hand and never have to face physical abuse or assault from an unruly fan.”

The Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) has publicly supported HB 5222. CIAC serves as the sole governing body for inter-scholastic athletic activities in Connecticut.

“This is certainly legislation that is overdue,” said Michael Savage, executive director of the CIAC. “We are absolutely delighted that it passed the House. We need the protections the bill would provide, since there has been an increase in assaults against officials during the past few years and a number of them have chosen not to continue officiating because of exposure to these type of incidents.”